



# Relationships, Relationships, Relationships

## Critical Questions Before We Begin

- ★ *How well does your faculty know one another?*
- ★ *Do you celebrate and benefit from your diversity?*
- ★ *Are your relationships strong enough to carry you through difficult times?*
- ★ *Is it safe to disagree?*
- ★ *Do you trust one another enough to support personal and professional learning?*
- ★ *Are you prepared to make complex decisions together?*
- ★ *Do you laugh and play together?*

## Why worry about relationships?

**Y**ou may have heard the expression, "Location, Location, Location" applied to real estate. In education our motto should be, "Relationships, Relationships, Relationships!" We're in a people business and our success depends on how well we develop productive and supportive relationships. As educational leaders we must do far more than prevent mutiny on our ships. Our success is defined by our ability to help students learn, cooperate with colleagues, communicate with parents, and reach out to our local community. Our mission is to inspire visions of a just society and hope for a better future. All of our efforts are based on relationships.

"It is well to remember that the entire population of the universe, with one trifling exception, is composed of others."

—John Andrew Holmes



Building relationships involves getting acquainted, creating an identity, providing mutual support, celebrating diversity, and developing synergy.<sup>1</sup> This occurs at two different levels within cooperative meetings. Teambuilding activities allow small groups of individuals to develop the skill and will to work as cooperative and caring teams. Community building activities operate on a larger scale that includes all of the participants at the meeting.

## 1. Team Building

**TEAM: Together Everyone Achieves More.** Close your eyes and picture a sailboat cutting through the waves and turning sharply around a buoy in an international race. Zoom in and you'll see small teams within the crew working together, pulling their weight, and coordinating their efforts to meet the overall goal. Teamwork makes our lives easier, more pleasant, and much more successful. We can harness and channel more energy together than we can on our own. Many of today's workplaces are networked, interdependent communities where teams coordinate their efforts with other teams. By working in small supportive teams, we model the future for our students — practicing the skills we want them to learn.

Teambuilding activities are fun. Sharing a story about your funniest educational experience or your dream vacation may not seem important, but it begins a process of self-disclosure that helps people get to know and trust one another. People must feel comfortable before they'll begin to share important ideas, disagree, solve problems, or reflect on their practices. Learning to trust and participate in a small team is less threatening than speaking to the entire group. If we don't build supportive relationships, people may choose to sit back and say nothing. Investing time and energy in teambuilding throughout the school year produces many benefits: big and little, expected and unexpected. When everyone witnesses the creative sparks arising from interaction and diversity, a synergistic energy is released, which overflows into the daily workplace. We are all transformed in the process.

## 2. Community Building

Look up the term *community* in the dictionary and a number of comforting words and phrases tumble out. These include sharing, fellowship, mutual ownership, feelings of membership, and growing together. On a sailing ship, small teams have specialized responsibilities, but they work within the larger social fabric of the crew. Identity forms in expanding circles. We want individuals to identify with their personal goals: as members of various teams, and also as part of the entire school community. Community building is the process by which the members of a school community, with different backgrounds, talents, and experiences, develop the relationships required to form a supportive interdependent network focused on continual improvement of teaching and learning. Successful community building results in increased pride in oneself, one's team, and one's faculty, as well as an enhanced feeling of belonging.

Activities that build community are structured so participants acquire respect for the diversity and strengths of individuals at the same time that they acquire respect for the faculty as a whole.

**"I am done with great things and big plans, great institutions and big successes. I am for those tiny, invisible loving human forces that work from individual to individual, creeping through the crannies of the world like so many rootlets, or like the capillary oozing of water, which, if given time will rend the hardest monuments of pride."**

—William James

**"This is the team. We're trying to go to the moon. If you can't put someone up, please don't put them down."**

—NASA motto



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Without this larger focus, teambuilding can result in individuals identifying so strongly with their own teams that barriers are created that diminish wider communication among the staff. Building community develops the capacity for everyone on the staff to work together respectfully and increases the ease with which the faculty can re-create and reconfigure teams. When people feel comfortable working with all of their colleagues, the purpose of the meeting can dictate how teams should be formed.

### How does building relationships reduce isolation?

Investing time in building relationships is important because teaching is often an isolating profession. While teachers are constantly surrounded by rich contacts with young people, they often work independently and lack opportunities for meaningful dialogue with their colleagues. Many teachers seek professional development opportunities and continue to hone their skills throughout their careers, but in most schools there's very little infrastructure to facilitate teamwork or sharing. Without this structured support, teachers are often left to sail the seas on their own, struggling with challenges in curriculum, instruction, assessment, social justice, or classroom management while someone else on the ship has already found a creative solution or would joyfully team up to unite forces in solving the problem.

Isolation can occur in schools of any size. Small elementary school faculties may have only one teacher at each grade level and small secondary schools may be comprised of teachers with vastly different expertise in subject areas. This makes shared planning and reflection more challenging. Large faculties have different concerns. They naturally divide into smaller operating compartments, as individuals identify most strongly with those who share their grade, division, work area, or subject specialty. Cliques may form if membership in these groups is perceived as exclusive, creating communication barriers, and isolating new and part-time staff. Historic rivalries may exist that focus groups so strongly on their own needs that they see themselves pitted against one another to obtain resources.

If left unaddressed, diversity or compartmentalization may reduce the flow of ideas, result in a lack of understanding of important roles and responsibilities, and foster misinformation about interactions within the system as a whole. While open mutiny may not occur, a grumbling defiance may spread like scurvy throughout the crew. In addition, isolation may be reinforced by traditional school cultures that operate with an unspoken policy of non-interference. In this type of culture, teachers are informally considered competent if other teachers, parents, department heads, and administrators leave them alone to do their job. No one wants to see the captain walking his or her way. Bringing classroom questions and difficulties into the open may be perceived as a sign of weakness, rather than an opportunity for professional dialogue and growth. It may seem more appropriate to figure out things alone. These dynamics make it difficult to trust one another and work together toward the ongoing goal of improving teaching and learning.

**"Laughter is the shortest distance between two people."**

—Victor Borge

**"People must believe in each other, and feel that it can be done and must be done; in that way they are enormously strong. We must keep up each other's courage."**

—Vincent Van Gogh

**"If someone listens, or stretches out a hand, or whispers a kind word of encouragement, or attempts to understand, extraordinary things begin to happen."**

—Loretta Girzartis



## Something Special Is Going On

Tenille had been at the elementary school for several months before she figured out why it was different from other places she had taught. At first she'd just felt welcome, glad that people spoke to her by name, and thankful that they seemed willing to share ideas and resources. It was more than just being kind to the new kid on the block. The faculty seemed to pride itself on working together. They shared a sense of ownership for their own learning and the learning of their students that went beyond their own classrooms.

It was not unusual to see teachers planning lessons in small groups. You could hear them brainstorming ideas, laughing, debating the merits of different instructional strategies, and dividing up the work. They didn't always agree, but an exciting kind of energy seemed to arise from the diversity of their ideas.

Tenille had already been drawn into the group that taught in her hallway. Together they had worked through a unit. They had identified the enduring knowledge that they wanted their students to achieve; selected assessments that would let them measure student progress; designed activities; and shared strategies for providing support.

There was a level of trust that Tenille had not seen before. Classroom doors were left open and the administration often dropped

in to chat with teachers or students. People not only celebrated one another's successes, but they also seemed willing to talk about problems and look for solutions together.

The more Tenille thought about it, the more she realized that the spirit of community at the school hadn't happened by accident. Faculty meetings were structured to help people get to know one another. They always contained a little bit of fun and an opportunity to share something about yourself with a few other people. It was much easier to approach a colleague in the hallway after you had shared amusing stories about home renovations.

Meeting by meeting, Tenille got to know more and more of the faculty. It seemed that everyone, even people who had taught at the school for years, was still finding out new things about one another. Tenille found she could use the suggestions of her colleagues and adapt the activities to build a sense of community in her own classroom.

Meetings also provided opportunities for professional dialogue. Tenille noticed that many of the activities modeled the kinds of supportive discussions she had participated in around the school. There was a kind of consistency to it that made Tenille wonder what role the meetings had originally played in building relationships within the school.



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Patterns of isolation and non-interference repeat themselves at each level of the education hierarchy. Administrators, superintendents, regional coordinators, district directors, and government officials are separated from others who have similar roles and responsibilities in different locations. Like admirals of their own fleets, they spend most of their time working autonomously at their own level of the hierarchy and coordinating the work of their employees. Without consciously building relationships within and across levels of the hierarchy, people become isolated from each other. Isolation is stressful. Research demonstrates that a lack of a social/emotional support system actually depletes the immune system and leads to less ability to cope with physical and mental stress.<sup>2</sup> It shifts energy away from creativity and learning. Professional growth dwindles.

The quality of relationships among staff directly relates to the quality of outcomes for students, including the ability of staff to produce academic gains. There is strong empirical, as well as philosophical, support for the primacy of trust among staff. In their classic book on this topic, *Trust in Schools: A Core Resource for Improvement*, Anthony Bryk and Barbara Schneider write,

...we argue that the social relationships at work in school communities comprise a fundamental feature of their operations. The nature of these social exchanges, and the local cultural features that shape them, condition a school's capacity to improve. Designing good schools requires us to think about how best to organize the work of adults so that they are more likely to fashion together a coherent environment for the development of children. We have learned, based on our research on school reform in Chicago, that a broad base of trust across a school community lubricates much of a school's day-to-day functioning and is a critical resource as local leaders embark on ambitious improvement plans.<sup>3</sup>

Bryk and Schneider provide evidence that "relational trust" determines not only the quality of life among teachers, but the quality of outcomes for students. Relational trust consists of four elements:

**Respect.** *Do we genuinely dignify the person and ideas of others?*

**Competence.** *Is the ability to teach well a core value?*

**Personal Regard.** *Do we care about one another personally and professionally?*

**Integrity.** *Do we trust one another to keep our word and to put the interests of students first?*

What is the evidence that relational trust really makes a difference? Studying Chicago schools, the authors found dramatically higher levels of trust in high academic performance schools compared to those with low academic outcomes. (See Figures 2.1 and 2.2.)

**"You can dream, create, design, and build the most wonderful idea in the world, but it requires people to make the dream a reality."**

—Walt Disney

**"We are all affecting the world every moment, whether we mean to or not. Our actions and states of mind matter, because we're so deeply interconnected with one another."**

—Ram Dass

**"Make yourself necessary to somebody."**

—Ralph Waldo Emerson



Figure 2.1

Academic Performance	Top-Quartile Schools	Bottom-Quartile Schools
Trust in Fellow Teachers	75% Strong or Very Strong	Over 50% Little or No Trust
Trust in Principal	Almost 100% Strong or Very Strong	66% Little or No Trust

Although these findings are a real eye-opener, they do not prove a causal relationship: Certainly it is easier to establish and maintain trusting relationships in successful, compared to struggling, schools. To provide evidence for a causal link, Byrk and Schneider examined the test scores of two hundred Chicago schools over a five-year period (1991–1996). Trust scores were obtained for teachers at the outset of the five-year period and the probability of making significant gains in math and reading was calculated for schools with strong and weak levels of relational trust. The results argue strongly for the importance of relational trust.

Figure 2.2

Initial Level of Trust	Probability of Significant Math & Reading Gains
Strong	50%
Weak	14%

The link between trust and academic improvement remained even after factors such as economic level were controlled. Importantly, looking at the schools over time revealed that among the schools with low initial levels of trust, only those who strengthened trust over the years made gains in achievement. Where there was no improvement in relational trust over time among teachers, there was no improvement in academic achievement among students.

Byrk and Schneider summarize a host of additional studies and evidence supporting their conclusion that relational trust constitutes a “moral resource for school improvement.”

“All learning has an emotional base.”

—Plato

“What is honored in a country will be cultivated there.”

—Plato

“We are the ones we’ve been waiting for.”

—June Gordon

Relationship building has often been left to social committees who organize events where people celebrate holidays, participate in sports and activities, eat, laugh, and tell stories. Participation is voluntary and viewed as separate from the day-to-day operations of the school or district. These activities help colleagues get to know one another in a social setting, but they are not sufficient to build an inclusive sense of community. Family obligations, workloads, and personal preferences keep a number of staff away. Even though these gatherings include enough “teacher talk” or “edu-babble” to frighten even well-intending spouses, the conversations rarely delve into the specifics of best practice or focus on building a fellowship of learners. While the individuals involved definitely have fun, the activities do not build relationships among the entire crew or connect to the journey.



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To build a collaborative culture and create a community of leaders and learners, it's necessary to work at building relationships more frequently and in a more systematic manner. Meetings provide one of the few forums in which relationships can be built within and across schools and districts to provide support for professional learning, personal growth, identifying underlying problems, idea generation, and collaborative decision making. Building and sustaining supportive relationships results in personal confirmation, increased job satisfaction, resilience to stress, meaningful interactions with others, and increased effectiveness. Before people are willing to take intellectual and creative risks, they need to know that they belong and can influence their environment.

### What are the five aims of building relationships?

Kagan identifies five aims for the development and maintenance of supportive relationships within a team, classroom, or school community.<sup>4</sup>

#### 1. Getting Acquainted

Getting acquainted activities help people learn about one another and increase their sense of belonging. Teachers may not know new members of their faculty, members of different departments, support personnel, or their administration. Even something as simple as being able to greet everyone by name creates a more welcoming and respectful environment. Ocean liners employ cruise directors to ensure people come out of their cabins and mingle. As meeting leaders, we are responsible for this role. Teambuilding or “contact” activities should be used each time participants are organized into new teams. Faculty should not be asked to work together without a chance to introduce themselves and briefly get to know their teammates. The contact activity can be as simple as a RoundRobin in which each member in turn states his/her name and describes a ride he/she would like to take at an amusement park in terrifying detail. Other structures such as Team Window help the team discover commonalities, such as favorite books, movies, and hobbies. A large investment in teambuilding is necessary if participants are going to stay together in a home team for an extended period of time. They need to know one another well enough that they can work through problems as they arise. Community building activities also help people to discover what they have in common. Activities that build community increase the number of social contacts people make during a meeting because they actively involve and mix everyone in the room. We are social creatures. It feels good to be known and accepted. People change and grow, so the process of getting acquainted is never completed and it is important to continue to use structures that promote personal and professional conversations.

#### 2. Creating Identity

Champagne bottles are smashed as ships are named and glide into the water for the first time. Each boat has a unique personality. They are so individual that retired sailors speak of their ships as lost loves. Schools use special colors, uniforms, teams, cheers, logos, and traditions to create and celebrate their unique identity. These symbols abound at sporting events, prom, graduation ceremonies, reunions, and in the awards and

**“There are billions of people in the world, and every one of them is special. No one else in the world is like you.”**

—Muhammad Ali

**“One person may supply the idea for a company, community or nation, but what gives the idea its force is a community of dreams.”**

—Andre Malraux

**“If everyone is moving forward together; then success takes care of itself.”**

—Henry Ford



pictures that honor past graduates and faculty. Identity is important. We work harder and are even willing to make sacrifices for the benefit of our team or school. When we feel part of a unique community, it becomes part of our core identity. It changes who we are and who we want to become.

Identity can be formed at a variety of different levels. A home team in a staff meeting can build an identity by defining itself in a unique way, such as creating a name, bringing snacks, sharing a specific space, solving a problem, or presenting its findings. Activities that create team identity include Team Chants, Team Cheers, Team Windows, and Team Statements. Successful completion of any home team activity in a meeting enhances the sense of team identity. Working in heterogeneous teams stretches the connections that individuals have within the school or district. Identifying strongly with teammates, who do not share the same grade or subject area, opens doors to connect with others and broadens individual understanding of the “big picture” by promoting a sense of ownership based on the common purpose of working together to improve teaching and learning.

A positive and unique faculty identity is built as teachers support one another’s professional development, find ways to increase student learning, solve problems, and share in informed decision making. The specific products or innovations developed are not as important as the process of selecting, creating, and celebrating a significant achievement together. Each faculty must make its own journey. As personal and professional goals become intertwined, people work harder to support common norms and values. They also feel secure enough in their identity as a valued colleague to speak up when they disagree, to look at alternatives, and to explore far-reaching issues. This positive interdependence results in a caring attitude and a shared purpose. We will not abandon our ship. We are proud to be working together for our students, our faculty, and our school community.

**“As a kid I learned that my brother and I could walk forever on a railroad track and never fall off — if we just reached across the track and held each other’s hand.”**

**—Steve Potter**

**“You’ve got to have a safe environment where people can make mistakes and learn from them. If we’re not making mistakes, we’re not going anywhere.”**

**—Gordon Forward**

**“It is in the shelter of each other that the people live.”**

**—Irish proverb**

### 3. Providing Mutual Support

The healthy functioning of a school community depends on how well it nurtures respectful and trustworthy relationships. Like a crew at sea, a faculty must live with one another for extended periods of time. Support from the outside is not always available, and it’s often impractical or impossible to jump to another ship. People must learn to count on one another. Building trust takes time. As people get acquainted and develop their identity as a group, they identify common goals and learn to support one another. They share a desire to assist others when help is requested and trust enough to ask for help when it’s needed. Feelings of anxiety are a natural part of both creativity and change. Relationships that foster trust and compassion permit the faculty to contain this anxiety and work with it, rather than allowing it to paralyze productivity or pit individuals against each other. As the amount of trust within an organization grows, so does its capacity to tackle the complex tasks inherent in change. Trust is at the heart of a community of leaders and learners. It allows people to be honest, open up, identify personal goals, and grow. Activities





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that build teams and community involve participants in an open, non-threatening environment where people can practice the skills required to support one another. These initial conversations provide a foundation of understanding so that individuals may enter into more difficult dialogues to define goals, improve practice, solve problems, or share in important decisions. Home teams can become a base of support between meetings for teachers to innovate, experiment, coach, and grow professionally. Only when people feel supported will they risk disclosing personal concerns or take the intellectual risks required for personal growth.

### 4. Celebrating Diversity

The faculty of a school is comprised of diverse individuals selected to work together, in part because of their different talents. To work effectively, individuals must learn to accept and appreciate those with knowledge, values, cultures, learning styles, and characteristics different from their own. Celebrating diversity begins with tolerance, but it develops into something much greater. It is the recognition that our differences provide the creative sparks we need to be productive. As the nature of the challenges change, the strengths of individuals become apparent and everyone benefits from them. We must make sure to structure activities so that the talents of different individuals will shine. Some individuals are good at analyzing data, others at synthesizing ideas, brainstorming alternatives, displaying ideas in an artistic manner, identifying inequities, or predicting roadblocks. Teams and communities benefit from a diversity of knowledge, skills, attitudes, and educational philosophies. Rather than seeking out like-minded people, the ethic of celebrating diversity results in purposefully inviting people to the table who represent significantly different perspectives on an issue. A great deal can be learned by seeking to understand individuals with whom we disagree.

Valuing different perspectives guards against “group-think,” a symptom that can arise if individuals feel it’s more important to agree with the group than to voice their own concerns. If someone had shaken the universal belief that the *Titanic* was unsinkable, there might have been more lifeboats on board and the ship might have slowed down when faced with the risk of icebergs. Richer interaction, recognition of potential pitfalls, more creative solutions, equally beneficial options, and greater flexibility arise from valuing diversity.

### 5. Developing Synergy

*Synergy* refers to the increased energy released when individuals are working and playing cooperatively. Synergy unleashes the energy created from synthesizing diverse ideas. It’s a feeling of excitement and flow that allows energy to be focused on the job, rather than wasted worrying if other people value your contribution. The team product created from synthesizing diverse ideas is often better than the product of even the best individual working alone. Each person draws from his/her own thoughts, inspirations, and experiences to contribute a bit of information, part of a solution, or a zany new idea. Ideas bounce among people and interact. People examine their own ideas more closely and reach deeper to discover more satisfying solutions. In the process, ideas are transformed and the whole is far greater than the sum of its parts. Synergistic thinking can lead to engineering breakthroughs such as the hull designs that create winning sailboats. Innovation is always an option. To enter the coopera-

**“We are, of course, a nation of differences. Those differences don’t make us weak. They’re the source of our strength.”**  
—Jimmy Carter

**“People can collaborate to do the wrong things as well as the right things and by collaborating too closely they can miss danger signals and growth opportunities.”**  
—Michael Fullan

**“We all need an occasional whack on the side of the head to shake us out of routine patterns, force us to rethink problems, and stimulate us to ask new questions that may lead to other right answers.”**  
—Roger Von Oech



tive process fully, teachers need to feel the power of synergy. Activities to build community are designed to release synergy in the moment and as an ongoing process. Synergy moves us away from win-lose thinking where individuals compete to have their own ideas selected. Instead we move to win-win thinking, where everyone is involved in creating and supporting the solution.<sup>5</sup> We're smarter together.

## How are teams created?

Teams of four are ideal for meetings. They're small enough for active participation by all teammates, and split evenly for equal participation during pair work. If there's an extra person, form a team of five. If there are two extra people, form two teams of three. Many leaders create two kinds of teams in their meetings:

### 1. Home Teams

Home teams are stable groups of four that provide the base for cooperative meetings throughout the semester or year. Home teams are heterogeneous. They should be carefully constructed to balance gender, ethnicity, experience, expertise, and enthusiasm. They are multi-grade and multi-discipline. Heterogeneity ensures a diversity of skills and opinions, as well as opportunities for peer coaching. Heterogeneous teams break up cliques and status hierarchies. Spreading expertise and enthusiasm among the teams makes it easier to facilitate the meeting.

Participants may be asked to provide input into team composition by listing six to eight people with whom they would like to work. Just like students, there may be some teachers who don't want to work together. If you know your faculty well, you may wish to avoid placing these members together in a home team, but create shorter opportunities for them to practice working together in breakout teams. To be consistent in words and actions with ourselves as well as with our students, we must create a supportive environment where everyone can work with everyone else. The leader uses the preference list to create home teams that ensure everyone is working with at least one familiar colleague. This process provides a useful model for teachers to create teams in their classrooms. Once home teams are established, they should be left together for a quarter, a semester, or a year. This extended time allows the individuals to work through initial problems and develop into a functional team. With time teammates bond and learn how to learn together.

### 2. Breakout Teams

Breakout teams are temporary. If you are new to the setting, you may wish to rely on breakout teams initially until you get to know the staff. A lot can be learned from changing the composition of teams and observing how individuals interact. Working in breakout teams allows individuals to transfer their cooperative skills to new settings. Breakout teams may be created randomly to provide an opportunity to exchange ideas with a variety of new people, or they may be created purposefully to allow teachers from the same department or divi-

**"Synergy —  
the bonus that  
is achieved  
when things  
work together  
harmoniously."  
—Mark Twain**

**"To play and win  
together you must  
practice together."  
—Lewis Edwards**

**"Talent wins  
games, but  
teamwork and  
intelligence win  
championships."  
—Michael Jordan**

**"We > I."  
—Spencer Kagan**



sion to interact. The content of the cooperative meeting is your rudder. It establishes whether it's more appropriate to have participants work in home teams, random breakout teams, or purposeful breakout teams. Meetings may start with participants in home teams, move to breakout teams for a specific activity, and then return to home teams for sharing. Routines for greeting people, as breakout teams form and thanking them as teams dissolve, should be established so that teachers learn how to model the behaviors that they would expect from their students in the classroom.

## **How are home teams maintained?**

Home teams meet together on a regular basis during meetings in order to develop an identity and learn to work together. It's good practice to have participants start meetings in their home teams so that they can informally share what has happened since the last meeting, celebrate recent successes, and share refreshments together. Team folders or portfolios can be used to keep information about structures used in meetings, activities completed by the team, and ideas for modifying structures for classroom use. Including a question for team discussion at the beginning of each meeting using a RoundRobin structure ensures that team members start by sharing ideas. (See Team Discussion Questions on page 2.12.) Each person records his/her teammates' contributions. The more team members interact, the more familiar they become working with one another. Once the home teams are solidly established, breakout teams can be used whenever necessary. Participants may then be asked to return to their home team and share what they have learned. At times home teams may be assigned a task to complete between meetings. This can involve reading journal articles, observing one another using an instructional strategy in the classroom, sharing a favorite resource, or gathering data. Over a year or a semester, home team members may become close colleagues. When home teams are reassigned, let team members celebrate their achievements, express their appreciations, and say goodbye to their teammates before they begin their new experience.

**"Alone we can  
do so little;  
together we can  
do so much."**

—Helen Keller

**"Nobody, but  
nobody, can make  
it out here alone."**

—Maya Angelou

**"The best thing to  
hold on to in life is  
each other."**

—Audrey Hepburn



# Team Discussion Questions

Question of the Day

Question of the Day

Question of the Day

Question of the Day

Person #1

Person #2

Person #3

Person #4



## How do we build the will and skill to cooperate?

Why would someone want to participate in a cooperative meeting? The obvious answer is that cooperative meetings are more enjoyable and productive. When we cooperate, deep structures in the brain are activated. These are associated with pleasure and reward.<sup>6</sup> Nevertheless, there may be resistance to cooperative meetings because they look, sound, and feel different from traditional meetings. In fact, cooperative meetings may not fit with people's existing perspectives of work. They change the rules. It's like changing ships – we're still sailing, but everything is unfamiliar. Collaboration requires a higher level of participation and greater social, creative, and intellectual risks. Teambuilding activities, community building activities, celebrations, appreciations, affirmations, and meeting productivity generate the will to cooperate, but it takes some time to develop the respect and trust necessary for this to occur.

Individuals who have a strong interpersonal intelligence are likely to find cooperative meetings a welcome relief while those who are socially shy or independent learners may find it stressful. Similar mixed reactions occur among students when cooperative learning structures are introduced to the classroom. The rules of the game have been altered and an adjustment period is required while people figure out and become comfortable with their new roles and responsibilities. Take care that you don't increase the length of meetings when cooperative learning structures are introduced. Learning the structures requires time and will reduce what can be accomplished in the first few meetings. As comfort levels with the structures rise, productivity will increase. A cooperative approach provides more opportunity for social support and fun, involvement in goal setting and decision making, and professional development. In other words, this approach helps meetings become a dynamic time to work and share together.

Even with the will to cooperate, it's dangerous to assume that adults automatically come to meetings with the skills necessary to cooperate. It's even more dangerous to assume they'll want this brought to their attention. Educators take pride in their ability to work with students. Suggesting that they need to improve their "people" skills may be perceived as questioning their competence. In reality, human interactions are so complex that all of us can continue to learn the skills of communication, conflict resolution, motivation, and relationships throughout our lives.

Luckily, our students always provide a non-threatening rationale for introducing social skills development to meetings. While adults may not initially recognize the need to work on their own skills, they'll readily admit that their students need to know how to work more effectively with one another. The need to teach interpersonal skills to young people provides the rationale for practicing social skill structures with faculty.

Johnson and Johnson identify the cooperative skills that students require to work effectively in teams.<sup>7</sup> (See Table 2.1: Social Skills Development on page 2.15.)

**"The most important single ingredient in the formula of success is knowing how to get along with people."**

—Theodore Roosevelt

**"We are what we repeatedly do. Excellence, then, is not an act, but a habit."**

—Aristotle

**"It is social support from and accountability to valued peers that motivates committed efforts to succeed."**

—David & Roger Johnson



Meetings provide a natural forum to practice the behaviors and skills required to collaborate. There are a variety of ways to foster the development of social skills, including:

- *modeling,*
- *appreciation,*
- *practice,*
- *assigning roles,*
- *reflective processing,*
- *planning,*
- *the use of specific structures,*
- *reaching consensus on norms of behavior,*
- *defining the cooperative behaviors within the context of student performance,*
- *role-playing,*
- *initiative tasks,*
- *fishbowl observations, and*
- *professional discussion of topics such as conflict management.*

Positive interactions such as listening and paraphrasing, assigning roles, and providing affirmations are very helpful. Kagan describes “four tools” to structure for social skill acquisition.<sup>8</sup>

• **Roles and Gambits.** The leader assigns task-specific and generic roles to assure the participation of each person. Task-specific roles on a specific project might include Recorder and Reporter. Generic roles can be used at any time. Generic roles include Taskmaster, Cheerleader, Checker, Gatekeeper (whose job it is to equalize participation).

• **Modeling, Reinforcement, and Practice.** The leader promotes development and use of social skills by holding up as a model successful use of social skills and then encouraging the “trying on” of those skills. “I notice this group has decided to take turns contributing ideas; let’s all try that in our teams to kick this off.”

• **Reflection and Planning.** The leader asks groups to reflect on their use of a social skills. “Let’s stop and talk for a moment about how equal our participation has been.” Then the leader asks groups to make a plan to improve the use of that skill: “Please talk about how you can make the participation in your groups more equal. Make a plan.” Reflection is looking back; planning is looking forward. Reflection and planning can be used to develop any social skill.

• **Structures.** The leader asks participants to use a variety of structures to promote social skills development such as Paraphrase Passport (to develop empathy and listening); Talking Chips (to develop turn taking); Team Statements (to develop synergy and consensus seeking). Most Kagan Structures promote social skill development.

“If you want  
others to be  
happy, practice  
compassion.  
If you want to be  
happy, practice  
compassion.”  
—Dalai Lama

“Innovation is  
simply group  
intelligence  
having fun.”  
—Michael Nolan

“Personal  
relationships are  
the fertile soil  
from which all  
advancement in  
real life grows.”  
—Ben Stein



Table 2.1

## Social Skills Development

### Forming...

- ☐ Move into groups without noise and bothering others.
- ☐ Stay with the group.
- ☐ Use quiet voices.
- ☐ Encourage everyone to participate.
- ☐ Use names, look at the speaker, no "put-downs," keep hands and feet to oneself.

### Functioning...

- ☐ Direct group's work (state and restate purpose of assignment; provide time limits; offer procedures).
- ☐ Express verbal support and acceptance verbally and nonverbally.
- ☐ Ask for help or clarification.
- ☐ Offer to explain or clarify.
- ☐ Paraphrase others' contributions.
- ☐ Energize the group.
- ☐ Describe feelings when appropriate.

### Formulating...

- ☐ Summarize aloud as completely as possible.
- ☐ Seek accuracy by correcting and/or adding to summaries.
- ☐ Seek elaboration.
- ☐ Seek clever ways of remembering ideas and facts.
- ☐ Demand vocalization.
- ☐ Ask other members to plan aloud how they would teach the material.

### Fermenting...

- ☐ Criticize ideas, not people.
- ☐ Differentiate when there is disagreement within the group.
- ☐ Integrate different ideas into a single position.
- ☐ Ask for justification on conclusions or answers.
- ☐ Extend other members' answers.
- ☐ Probe by asking in-depth questions.
- ☐ Generate further answers.
- ☐ Test reality by checking the group's work.

From: Johnson & Johnson<sup>7</sup>



As working on collaborative skills becomes accepted as a part of the school culture, a more direct approach can be taken. Professional development can be provided on topics, such as empathic listening, emotional intelligence, conflict mediation, bias-free interviewing, student-led parent/teacher conferences, peer coaching, and group processing. The ongoing development of these skills enhances interactions in meetings, classrooms, and in the lives of students and teachers beyond the school.

## Why include celebrations and affirmations?

Celebrations can be added to cooperative meetings to reinforce valuable traditions and encourage new activities that support a culture of collaboration. They're part of building relationships because they support an abundance mentality in which people are genuinely happy to recognize the achievements of others.<sup>9</sup> Themes, such as school spirit, quality, teamwork, and risk taking, can be selected to focus celebrations and generate good news stories. Silly prizes add to the excitement. Selection of themes and recipients may begin with the meeting leader and evolve over time so that the responsibility is shared among the faculty.

Affirmations are positive statements that give thanks, encouragement, praise, or validation. Meetings that are organized using cooperative learning structures are filled with opportunities for participants to show their appreciation for one another. It takes skill to give and receive affirmations in an appropriate manner. Meetings provide the opportunity to practice this skill. It can begin as simply as having participants thank their partners, give each other high fives, or shake hands within an activity before they move on to another conversation. As people become more comfortable expressing their appreciation for each other's efforts, creative ways to say, "Good For You!" can be brainstormed. These positive expressions are referred to as affirmation gambits. This brainstormed list can be transferred to gambit cards that can be drawn at the end of each interaction to provide strategies. It's nice to hear a colleague say, "That was one of the most brilliant ideas I have ever heard!" even if he/she has been prompted to do so. While affirmations initially sound awkward and contrived, with practice they become naturally integrated into conversation within and beyond meetings. Changes in attitude often follow changes in behavior as people recognize the intrinsic value of a new course of action. Small beginnings are important. (See Affirmation Gambits, page 5.24.)

**"Encourage each other to become the best you can be. Celebrate what you want to see more of."**

—Tom Peters

**"Appreciation is a wonderful thing; it makes what is excellent in others belong to us as well."**

—Voltaire

**"I can live for two months on a good compliment."**

—Mark Twain





## What initial challenges will I face introducing relationship building activities to meetings?

Introducing teambuilding and community building activities to meetings can be challenging. While teachers may understand the importance of student teambuilding and class building, they may initially view these activities as a poor use of their own time in meetings. Current challenges in education have left many educators overburdened and overworked. Relationship building activities do not fit existing perceptions of what work should look and feel like. If a culture of non-interference is in place and meetings have traditionally focused on information transmission, the prevailing attitude may be, “Tell us what we need to know and let’s get on with our own work.” This is a rational argument in a paradigm where teaching is viewed as an individual activity and there’s little shared sense of responsibility for student progress as a faculty. Teachers have a lot of work to do and, after all, their lessons and grading for tomorrow do not directly depend on the person down the hall. Faculty members who have worked together for extended periods of time may feel that they know people well enough to be collegial and don’t need to indulge in activities to create teams or community. For some teachers, activities that build community in faculty meetings may be their first introduction to cooperative learning techniques and they may not know what to make of it all. Similar reluctance may exist at meetings of principals or superintendents, even though they would benefit from increased support in handling the mounting responsibility of their roles.

To move beyond reluctance, connect activities designed to build relationships directly to the larger purposes of the meeting. Use the content of your meeting as your rudder. The tiller is in your hand. If your meeting focuses on solving problems, make sure that the Find Someone Who activity that you have created as a community builder focuses on problems people have solved in the past. In this way you reap the relationship building benefits of the structure while providing an anticipatory set for the larger purpose of your meeting.

Time should be spent reflecting on how the participants can use the structures with their own content and in their own settings. Participants may not see the connection between these activities and their ability to work together. Discuss the advantages of having cooperation as a compass. We allow the cooperative process to guide us. Unless this connection is made clear, relationship activities are sometimes viewed as a waste of professional time. Each activity naturally leads to a discussion of both content and structure. Teachers should have the opportunity to discuss how they would change the content to use the structure to help their students get to know one another or to explore current academic topics. At an administrative level, principals or superintendents should reflect on how they could transfer the structures to their own meetings and what content would be appropriate. Time should be taken to discuss the rationale that connects the creation of community with the effectiveness of teams and learning organizations. This helps to answer the unspoken question, “What does this mean to me and what does it mean to my practice?”

**“I have discovered in life that there are ways of getting almost anywhere you want to go, if you really want to go.”**

**—Langston Hughes**

**“They always say that time changes things, but you actually have to change them yourself.”**

**—Andy Warhol**

**“My motto was always to keep swinging. Whether I was in a slump or feeling badly or having trouble off the field, the only thing to do was keep swinging.”**

**—Hank Aaron**



## Chapter 2

# Relationships, Relationships, Relationships

**"Experience is  
a hard teacher  
because she gives  
the test first, the  
lesson afterwards."  
—Vernon Sanders  
Law**

**"Never give up  
on anybody."  
—Hubert H.  
Humphrey**

There's always tension between maintaining current efficiency and increasing long-term capacity. In the short run it is more efficient to keep doing things the way we've done them in the past, keep giving tasks to the people who have successfully completed them before, and let everyone work with the people they know and like the best. It feels comfortable. It avoids resistance. Everyone knows his/her role. It's harder to insist that people practice new skills, that they try new strategies that may not work well at first, or that they engage conflict by entering into difficult conversations. Learning is a messy business. In the long run, dealing with the discomfort and resistance associated with change produces enormous payoffs. It takes time, but with repeated involvement we reap the benefits of relationship building. Persist. The time spent developing relationships is essential to charting a new course for your organization. Cooperation is your compass. Your ongoing investment in developing the skills and attitudes people need to collaborate will allow your faculty to pull together in fair or foul weather.